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SUBJECT: OMAN'S NEW CENTRAL PRISON AND DETENTION CENTER

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Emboffs recently visited the Royal Oman Police's (ROP) new central prison and detention complex in the state of Samayl, located in Oman's interior. While most of the complex is still under construction, emboffs received a tour of the completed detention center for illegal workers. The center appeared clean and well run. Post will encourage the ROP to institute procedures to screen the detainee population for victims of trafficking in persons (TIP). End Summary.

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The Prison
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¶2. (SBU) On January 30, poloff and ARSO visited the site of the ROP's new penal complex in Samayl, located approximately 80 kilometers inland from Muscat. Major sections of the complex still are under construction, but once complete, the complex will hold Oman's central prison and a detention center for illegal foreign workers. The facility's director, ROP Colonel Humaid al-Khanbashi, briefed emboffs on the features of the site's future prison. According to Khanbashi, the compound will cover 600,000 square meters with a capacity to hold more than 3,000 inmates. Men, women and juveniles up to age 20 will be held in separate facilities of 2,200, 600, and 300 beds, respectively. Individual cells will vary in size, he said, but the largest is designed to hold a maximum of seven inmates. There will be a health clinic in each facility, and a hospital in the middle of the compound.

¶3. (SBU) Khanbashi stated that the ROP designed the prison with a focus on prisoner rehabilitation. The compound will include two farm plots and several exercise areas. Each inmate facility will have a library, classrooms and a lecture hall. In addition, the ROP has an agreement with the Ministry of Education (MOE) to help inmates finish their secondary education and MOE proctors will conduct the secondary school completion exam on-site. The primary mission of the prison is not to punish, but to prepare inmates to reenter society, Khanbashi said, as the inmates have "suffered their greatest punishment already" by bringing shame to their extended family and tribal communities. He anticipated that the prison population likely will not exceed more than 50% of total capacity any time in the near future. The new facility and low population gives the ROP an opportunity to focus on rehabilitation. "Now is our chance," he said, "while we have the resources and the time."

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The Detention Center
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¶4. (SBU) Although prison construction will not be complete

before the end of 2008 at the earliest, the ROP already is beginning to move prisoners into temporary quarters in the complex's detention center for illegal workers. The ROP closed its aging prison in Rumais in December 2007, for example, and transferred approximately 1,000 inmates to Samayl. At the time of emboffs' visit, the detention center was filled to nearly half of its 2,000-bed capacity, with the inmates from the Rumais prison separated into cell blocks according to gender, age and length/type of sentence. 142 foreign workers, mostly from Bangladesh and Pakistan, also were in the center that day. Khanbashi reminded emboffs that once the prison is complete, the ROP will move all of the convicted prisoners to that compound, leaving the detention center as a dedicated space for holding illegal foreign workers.

15. (SBU) Khanbashi took emboffs inside one of the detainee cell blocks as they toured the compound. The separate cell units, each with the capacity to hold approximately 30-40 detainees, appeared clean but sparsely furnished. In one cell, bedrolls for each detainee lay side by side at intervals on the concrete floor. Detainees remain in the detention center from a few days to several months, depending in large part on how quickly the government of Oman and the workers' respective embassies can arrange for their deportation. Many show up at the detention center without any form of identification from their country of origin, Khanbashi stated, and it often takes time for the relevant embassies to confirm nationality.

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No Screening for TIP
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16. (SBU) Poloff asked Khanbashi if he screens detainees to determine if any could be victims of trafficking in persons (TIP). "We are the last stop before deportation," he said, and confirmed that his officers are not instructed to conduct a thorough intake interview. He explained that the ROP captured most of the Samayl detainees during periodic sweeps targeting illegal workers. Before the ROP transfers them to the detention center from holding cells in local police stations, the Ministry of Manpower's (MOM) Directorate of Labor Care reviews each worker's case to determine his or her labor status. The MOM is thus responsible for determining if the workers are victims of a crime, Khanbashi stated. However, detainees do have the right at any time to lodge a complaint or volunteer information about their case, which the ROP would relay directly to the MOM.

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Comment
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17. (SBU) Based on Khanbashi's presentation, it appears that the ROP is building a modern facility that should be more than adequate to handle Oman's present and future inmate population. Khanbashi indicated that he would welcome USG support to improve the facility and expressed his interest in visiting a U.S. prison. One area for assistance could be in helping the ROP to institute a screening mechanism for TIP at the detention center (in addition to earlier in the detention process), and in training its officers in how to handle TIP victims. Post will discuss this idea with Omani officials and inform the Department if there is interest in USG assistance to institute such measures.
GRAPPO